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Editorial

The Neolithic from the Sahara to the southern Mediterranean coast: A review of the most recent research



1. Introduction

This special issue of Quaternary International, entitled 'The Neolithic from the Sahara to the southern Mediterranean coast: A review of the most recent research', is the result of the A10 Session organised by the 'Art and Civilisations in the Sahara During Prehistoric Times' Commission for the XVII world UISPP Congress in Burgos (Spain) (Fig. 1).

This UISPP Commission, founded following its proposal by Gabriel Camps and Eduardo Ripoll Perelló back in 1991, and currently presided by Barbara E. Barich, has as its main aim to update and increase knowledge of Saharan societies within their environmental contexts and gain further insights into their rock art. From a geographical point of view, the Commission considers the Sahara region in its maximum extension, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. Within this context, the Commission aims to provide an overview of the research carried out in this area, and to promote periodic meetings for the circulation and exchange of information on key issues such as Holocene climate and environment, cultural interactions, rock art and the cognitive world of North African regions during prehistory.

The session organised in Burgos dealt with the general theme of the Neolithisation process in the regions between the Saharan desert and the Mediterranean coast. Ten oral communications and one poster were presented during the session, and nine of these are presented here. Other colleagues who had showed interest in participating in our session, but were unable to attend the congress, were also invited and have contributed papers to this volume, adding a further five to the total (Hamdan et al.; Holdaway et al.; Kherbouche et al.; Linstädter et al.; Rowland and Bertini). The list of papers, in order of appearance in this volume, is as follows:

1. Linstädter, J., Kehl, M., Broich, M., López-Sáez, J.A. Chronostratigraphy, site formation processes and pollen record of Ifri n'Etsedda, NE Morocco;
2. Hamdan, M.A., Ibrahim, M.I.A., Shiha, M.A., Flower, R.J., Hassan, F.A., Eltelet, S.A.M. An exploratory Early and Middle Holocene sedimentary record with palynofossils and diatoms from Faiyum lake, Egypt;
3. Merzoug, S., Kherbouche, F., Sehil, N., Chelli, R., Slimane, H. Faunal analysis of the Neolithic units from the Gueldaman Cave GLD1 (Akbou, Algeria) and the shift in sheep/goat husbandry;

4. Kherbouche, F., Dunne, J., Merzoug, S., Hachi, S., Evershed, R.P. Middle Holocene hunting and herding at Gueldaman Cave, Algeria: An integrated study of the vertebrate fauna and pottery lipid residues.
5. Petrucci, G. The bone industry in the Capsian and Neolithic contexts of Eastern Maghreb: A technological and functional approach;
6. Lucarini, G., Radini A., Barton, H., Barker, J. The exploitation of wild plants in Neolithic North Africa. Use-wear and residue analysis on non-knapped stone tools from the Haua Fteah cave, Cyrenaica, Libya;
7. Soler, J., Soler, N. Cattle without herders: Animal and human beings in the prehistoric rock art of the Western Sahara;
8. Roubet, C., Amara, I. From art to context: Holocene roots of an Initial Neolithic Pastoralism (INP) in the Atlas Ouled Nail, Algeria;
9. Mulazzani, S., Belhouchet, L., Salanova, L., Aouadi, N., Dridi, Y., Eddargach, W., Morales, J., Tombret, O., Zazzo, A., Zoughlami, J. The emergence of the Neolithic in North Africa: A new model for the Eastern Maghreb;
10. de Faucomberge, E. Neolithic of Cyrenaica (north-east Libya): New enlightenments from recent research;
11. Rowland, J., Bertini, L. The Neolithic within the context of Northern Egypt: New results and perspectives from Merimde Beni Salama;
12. Holdaway, S., Phillips, R., Emmitt, J., Wendrich, W. The Fayum revisited: Reconsidering the role of the Neolithic package, Fayum north shore, Egypt;
13. McDonald, M.M.A. The pattern of Neolithization in Dakhleh Oasis in the Eastern Sahara;
14. Barich, B.E. The introduction of Neolithic resources to North Africa: A discussion in light of the Holocene research between Egypt and Libya.

Contributions presented at the congress, but not included in the volume:

1. Morales, J., Peña-Chocarro, L., Pérez-Jord, G., Zapata, M.L., Bokbot, Y., Vera-Rodríguez, J.C., Linstädter, J. Origins and spread of agriculture in North Africa: New archaeobotanical evidence from Morocco;
2. Lenssen-Erz, T. AAARC – African Archaeology Archive Cologne, an open access online archive on the archaeology and environmental history of Africa (poster).



Fig. 1. Participants at the UISPP Congress A10 Session, Burgos, September 2014. *Rear, left to right:* Giulio Lucarini, Iddir Amara, Emmanuelle Stoetzel, Giacomina Petruccio, Barbara E. Barich, Elodie de Faucamberge, Joaquim Soler, Narcís Soler, Jorg Linstädter. *Front, left to right:* Mary M.A. McDonald, Laure Salanova, Souhila Merzoug, Jacob M. Morales, Amy Prendergast.

The A10 session of the UISPP Burgos Congress aimed to attract contributions on the process of Neolithisation, on different adaptations to the environment, and on the interactions and exchanges among the human groups peopling North Africa during the Holocene. Research on the circulation of food resources and technologies was also welcomed, as well as studies on the ideological and symbolic aspects represented by rock art, this art representative of the most intimate sphere of North African Neolithic peoples. The Session highly encouraged a trans-regional debate among scholars who, in part, do not usually coincide at conferences. The choice of a wider geographical area allowed us to highlight, on the one hand, the cultural convergences between the Saharan regions and the coastal belt, and on the other, between the eastern and western spheres. The themes related to the Neolithisation process in North Africa, and in particular the ones concerning the arrival and spread of domesticates, despite being much discussed in the literature, have often been considered only on a regional basis, and specific areas have mostly been considered in isolation. In this volume, however, it is worth stressing that we consider North Africa as a whole, and this issue includes contributions that have resulted from research programmes carried out all throughout it in countries such as the Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

The 'transversal' nature of this special issue is not only expressed by its wide geographical span, but also arises from its strong multidisciplinary and the multiple methodologies it describes, which clearly shows in the papers here presented and whose themes range from the chronological to the symbolic, passing through the study of the palaeoenvironment, tool technology and function, and emphasizing also palaeoeconomic aspects.

The volume opens with a section comprising six contributions presenting the application of different scientific methods to the palaeoenvironmental reconstruction of specific research areas. The first study, by J. Linstädter et al., presents a sedimentological approach to the reconstruction of site formation process, applied

to the Ifri n'Etsedda site in northeastern Morocco and from which the chronology relative to the transition from the Epipalaeolithic to the Neolithic was derived. This is followed by a paper by M.A. Hamdan et al. in which the Holocene climate and environment of northern Egypt are reconstructed through the study of palynofossils and diatoms from Lake Faiyum. Two papers concerning the Gueldaman cave in northern Algeria follow. The first of these papers, by S. Merzoug et al., investigates the faunal remains and the shift in caprine husbandry at the site, and the second, by F. Kherbouche et al., presents a molecular and isotopic analysis of the food residues absorbed by ceramic sherds. The paper by G. Petruccio discusses the application of an integrated methodology based on the technological, typological and functional analysis of bone tools from several Capsian and Neolithic contexts of northern Algeria. The paper by G. Lucarini et al., adopting an integrated approach of use-wear and residue analyses of ground tools, investigates the exploitation of wild plants in northern Libya and how these were supplemented with domestic species from the Levant.

The second section of the volume comprises two papers that consider how animal domestication came about and how this process is captured in rock art. In the first of these studies, J. Soler and N. Soler investigate Neolithic rock art evidence from the Western Sahara, discussing the difficulties encountered when interpreting the pastoral scenes; the second paper, by C. Roubet and I. Amara focuses on rock art evidence relative to the pastoral Neolithic of the Algerian highlands.

The third, and final section of this special issue concludes with six papers dealing with the transition to food-producing economies using both regional and trans-regional perspectives, through the integrated application of different research methods. The first of these six conclusion papers, by S. Mulazzani et al., investigates the emergence of the Neolithic in the eastern Maghreb through the chrono-stratigraphic, economic and technological analyses of the sites of Hergla, Doukanet el Khoutifa and Kef Hamda. The following paper, by E. de Faucamberge, explores the beginning of

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